



## Mr. Spielberg's Mr. Lincoln

by Chuck Kleinhans

The arrival of Spielberg's *Lincoln* created an instant flood of online comments: from film reviewers about it as cinema, from historians and partisans about its historical accuracy, from political pundits about its relevance to current Obama topics. The President hosted a White House screening with director and stars; later Congress had a similar screening for members. And lots of bloggers had things to say, beyond how the film fit into the Oscar race.

This churn of discourse says something about the film, but more obviously it says something about how a film can enter into a public forum and become part of controversy and elicit a variety of responses and readings. Thirty years ago, John Hess and I examined the many different interpretations of the film *Reds* (Warren Beatty, 1981) offered by the Left at the time: "Reds on Reds."

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC28folder/Reds.html>

For us, that research meant many visits to the left-wing bookstores of the time and some large university libraries. Today, with the magic of the Internet, and the profusion of publications online and bloggers, I could collect discussions of *Lincoln* with desktop ease.

I've selected a few items that I found interesting (looking for contrast, largely): ranging from conservatives who liked the film to those who detested it, and the same game on the left. I've added a few comments when the URL doesn't indicate the specific topic. You can play it yourself by googling *Spielberg* + *Lincoln* and a term like *race*, *socialism*, *politics*, *slavery*, *abolition*, *Obama*, etc.

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/110113/spielbergs-lincoln-film-our-political-moment>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/opinion/in-spielbergs-lincoln-passive-black-characters.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/opinion/in-spielbergs-lincoln-passive-black-characters.html?_r=0)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/23/opinion/brooks-why-we-love-politics.html>

The movie portrays the nobility of politics in exactly the right way.

<http://jacobinmag.com/2012/11/lincoln-against-the-radicals-2/>

*Lincoln* is not a movie about Reconstruction, of course; it's a movie about old white men in beards and wigs heroically working together to save grateful black people.

[http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/spielbergs-lincoln-and-its-critics/?\\_r=0](http://douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/spielbergs-lincoln-and-its-critics/?_r=0)

Review defends the movie from its critics.

[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2012/11/lincoln\\_directed\\_by\\_steven\\_spielberg\\_starring\\_daniel\\_day\\_lewis\\_reviewed.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2012/11/lincoln_directed_by_steven_spielberg_starring_daniel_day_lewis_reviewed.html)

The values Abraham Lincoln has come to represent in the collective imagination—freedom, equality, justice, mercy—are the same values Spielberg has spent a career celebrating and not infrequently sentimentalizing.

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/politics/spielberg-s-lincoln-a-lesson-in-realpolitik-for-a-squeamish-age-20121119>

<http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Hollywood/2012/11/08/lincoln-review-daniel-day-lewis>

This normally arch-conservative Big Hollywood site (part of the rabid right Breitbart project) actually praises the film as even-handed, though it faults it for not being engaging movie-wise.

<http://bigthink.com/rightly-understood/the-best-lincoln-ever>

Conservative prof blogger endorses the film.

[http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/jan/10/how-close-lincoln/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+nybooks+%28The+New+York+Review+of+Books%29](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/jan/10/how-close-lincoln/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+nybooks+%28The+New+York+Review+of+Books%29)

Typically wonky NYRB discussion, complains about interpretation.

<http://coreyrobin.com/2012/11/25/steven-spielbergs-white-men-of-democracy/>

Extended critique of the film's racial politics from the author of "The Reactionary Mind" with links to other writer's remarks.

<http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2012/11/26/spielbergs-lincoln-movie-yet-more-white-saviors/>

Remarks on Corey Robin blog are followed by extended reader comments.

[http://www.salon.com/2012/12/17/spielberg\\_gets\\_lincoln\\_wrong/?source=newsletter](http://www.salon.com/2012/12/17/spielberg_gets_lincoln_wrong/?source=newsletter)

Reprint from the *LA Review of Books*; predictable complaint about not getting history right

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* asked several academics to weigh in on the film's "accuracy" There are running comments for each article.

- <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/11/30/a-filmmakers-imagination-and-a-historians/>
- <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/11/30/reel-lincoln-the-case-for-the-spielberg-film/>
- <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/12/05/spielberg-reconciliation-or-reconstruction/>
- <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2012/12/07/untellable-human-suffering/>

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history--archaeology/Mr--Lincoln--Goes--to--Hollywood--174944931.html>

<http://theglancereveals.tumblr.com/post/36891098244/the-map-the-compass-and-the-motor-the-radical>

Interesting survey of pundit reactions to the film followed by a discussion of political strategy and tactics, validating the Kushner-Spielberg approach.

<http://observer.com/2012/11/lincoln-rex-reed-daniel-day-lewis-tommy-lee-jones/>

Rex Reed on Spielberg's "bloated history lesson."

<http://conservativetimes.org/?p=12608>

Run-of-the-mill cranky conservative hates the film.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/334127/lincoln-richard-brookhiser#>

Conservative thumbs up.

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5bPw739eotXWMmSUE88FoyayxtM5ICR2>

Author of "Lincoln Unmasked" discusses the movie as a "whitewash."

[http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives\\_1/article\\_9402.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives_1/article_9402.shtml)

Nation of Islam call for boycott of film

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/26/obligatory-lincoln-post.html>

"This guy Jackie Earle Haley played the vice president of the CSA, Alexander Stephens, and he was just perfectly reprehensible. Watching him, almost half-man, half-snake, hiss out his imprecations against Lincoln and union and black people and rights, he looked and sounded exactly like some of these egregious hate-mongering nincompoops we have to deal with today, which I'm sure Spielberg intended."

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/27/a-civil-war-professor-reviews-lincoln.html>

History prof: film is "filled with a certain robust joy in the rough-and-tumble of American politics."

[http://www.salon.com/2012/11/25/what\\_spielberg's\\_lincoln\\_conveniently\\_leaves\\_out/](http://www.salon.com/2012/11/25/what_spielberg's_lincoln_conveniently_leaves_out/)

What Spielberg's "Lincoln" conveniently leaves out: concerned as Lincoln was about the power of corporations, he was also in bed with the most powerful titans of his era.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/11/30/paternalism-and-ass-covering-in-spielbergs-lincoln/>

Horse-Trading Versus Struggle

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-2267872/Lincoln-review-Steven-Spielbergs-biopic-heavy-heroic-speeches-light-historical-truth.html>

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/171461/trouble-steven-spielbergs-lincoln#>

<http://sonsofconfederateveterans.blogspot.com/2012/11/lincoln-film-is-propaganda.html>

<http://www.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/showbiz/2012/11/14/pkg-wynter-lincoln-historian.cnn.html>

<http://strugglesforjustice.com/2012/11/24/spielbergs-lincoln-speaks-to-our-dysfunctional-congress-of-today-as-much-as-the-divisions-of-1865/>

<http://watchdog.org/61936/va-lincoln-paints-picture-of-virginias-twisted-tax-preferences-critics-say/>

Virginia's preferential treatment of the film industry, said Mark Daugherty, chairman of the [Federation of Virginia Tea Party Patriots](#), is just one example of its "fundamentally unfair" tax favoritism, along with breaks for industries like beekeeping and wine.

<http://harpers.org/archive/2013/02/team-america/?%3E>

Thomas Frank: "Spielberg & Co. have gone out of their way to vindicate political corruption. They have associated it with the noblest possible cause ...*Lincoln* is a movie that makes viewers feel noble at first, but on reflection the sentiment proves hollow. This is not only a hackneyed film but a mendacious one."

[http://www.salon.com/2012/11/03/lessons\\_for\\_obama\\_from\\_abe\\_lincoln/](http://www.salon.com/2012/11/03/lessons_for_obama_from_abe_lincoln/)

<http://www.lewrockwell.com/2013/02/thomas-dilorenzo/spielbergs-sovietization-of-u-s-history-the-bait-and-switch-game-of-historicaldocudrama/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfliZYSRDlE>

DiLorenzo with YouTube speech critical of the film.

<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2012/11/linc-n12.html>

Socialist take on the film: "Lincoln has been pilloried by numerous practitioners of 'identity politics' as a racist and hypocrite.... socialists view the Civil War and Lincoln's role in quite a different fashion, as part of an objective historical assessment, paying full tribute to the revolutionary and world-historical character of the titanic struggle of the 1860s."

<http://www.amren.com/features/2012/11/spielbergs-lincoln/>

"It is hardly astonishing that Hollywood has turned out yet another movie with an anti-white agenda this time from the director of the execrable *Munich*, which also played fast and loose with history in its sordid depiction of Israel's use of a team of bungling amateurs to carry out a series of cold-blooded assassinations."

<http://frontpagemag.com/2012/ben-shapiro/the-lefts-lincoln/>

<http://www.internationalmarxisthumanist.org/articles/spielbergs-lincoln-karl-marx-american-revolution-kevin-anderson>

<http://www.tocquevillian.com/articles/0031.html>



Despite his feisty defense of this U.S. hero, Rush [Limbaugh] seemed taken aback by the vehemence of his callers' criticism of Lincoln—the first big government liberal and a racist to boot, indifferent to the plight of the slaves. In short, no hero at all.

<http://senseofevents.blogspot.com/2012/12/abe-lincoln-was-racist-bigot.html>

<http://www.examiner.com/review/movie-review-the-lincoln-movie-is-propaganda>

<http://hnn.us/article/149878>

History news network discussion (many more posted on this site).

<http://thefineartdiner.blogspot.com/2012/12/lincoln-masquerade-of-history.html>

“Now, in *today's context*, when there is a communist in the White House, and liberals in Hollywood are pushing for socialism...”

<http://www.movieguide.org/reviews/lincoln.html>

“Very strong moral worldview against slavery but with only some light, infrequently uplifting references to God, strong anachronistic foul language, and some strong politically correct revisionist history that obliterates many of the nuances about the history of President Lincoln and the War for Southern Independence, aka the Civil War, aka The War of Northern Aggression; 24 obscenities (including four ‘f’ words), 13 or 14 strong profanities (all but two are GDs), and three light profanities... no sex scenes but unmarried interracial couple lies in bed, thus implying that they are living together without being married.”

<http://www.chaunceydevega.com/2012/11/a-spielbergs-movie-lincoln-is-exercise.html>

A "Spielberg's Movie 'Lincoln' is an Exercise in Bad Historiography and Whitewashing of History" Roundup

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/171915/django-unchained-quentin-tarantinos-answer-spielbergs-lincoln#>

<http://nonsite.org/feature/django-unchained-or-the-help-how-cultural-politics-is-worse-than-no-politics-at-all-and-why>

Adolph Reed Jr. offers a long and detailed overview of issues regarding race in recent films. Only mentions Lincoln in passing, but the essay elaborates on key ongoing matters that underpin any discussion of race, class, and film.

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